



Cognitive Development

Infants and Toddlers

Cognitive development focuses on children's ability to acquire, organize, and use information in increasingly complex ways. Check out these strategies to support your child's cognitive development!

Thinking and Reasoning

Provide objects of varying sizes, textures, and shapes to play with such as empty appliance boxes (check for staples and sharp edges), baskets, or pillows.

Hide toys while infants are watching, and encourage them to find them.

Use routines and real-life situations to help children learn. For example, talk about body parts during diapering or "hot" and "cold" while eating. Talk about things that go together and the concepts of "same" and "different" while sorting laundry and picking up toys.

Point out and discuss changes in familiar objects, places, or events (parent receives a new haircut or furniture is moved).

Mathematical Thinking and Expression

During counting songs, such as "5 Little Ducks," finger plays, and number rhymes, use fingers or other objects to indicate the numbers.

Look for opportunities to teach concepts such as shapes and sizes through everyday routines and interactions. For example, say, "I see that you have red circles on your shirt."

Talk about "adding to" and "taking away" from blocks and other toys as your child plays with them.



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Scientific Exploration and Knowledge

Place your infant in various positions that allow them to observe the environment from different perspectives, like tummy time on a blanket, sitting with support, and seated in an infant swing.

Play “Name That Body Part” while changing your infant and toddler. For example, say “Where are your toes?” or “Show me your ears.”

When playing in water or sand, provide various objects, such as funnels, cups, and other toys to scoop, pour, fill, and dump.

Social Studies, Family, and Community Connections

Model pleasant, polite interactions with family members and other adults.

Show your child pictures of family members who do not live in the home, and talk about their relationship with your child.

Take a walk around the neighborhood, pointing out buildings, houses, schools, parks, playgrounds, or other features.

Creative Arts and Expression

Provide musical mobiles for infants to watch and listen to.

Give your child many opportunities to experience beauty through all their senses, like touching snow, looking at rainbows, smelling freshly mowed grass, tasting different foods, and listening to birds chirp.

Encourage your child to move and dance to music in different ways (march, clap, stomp, gallop, jump, sway, etc.).



This information was adapted from the South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines. To learn more, talk to your childcare provider or visit sdstepahead.com.